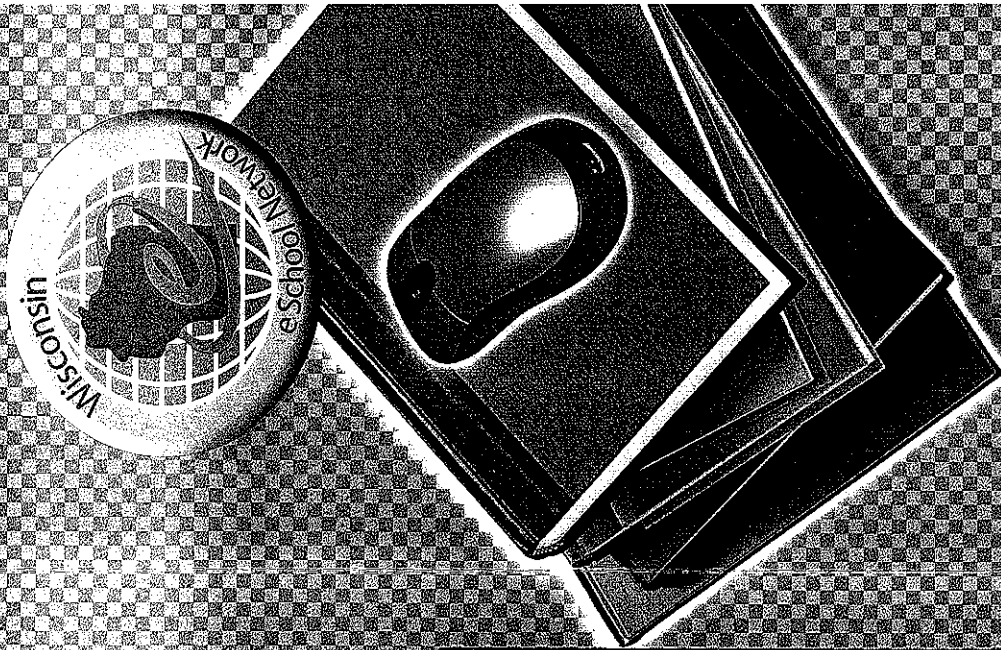
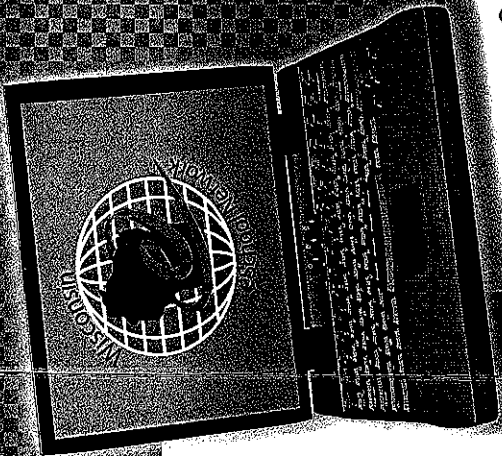


chool Network

The Wisconsin eSchool Network provides participating organizations with the resources and tools necessary to successfully implement an online school or program offering online courses that meet the needs of their students.

Registration, accounting and other record-keeping services are managed by the Wisconsin eSchool Network. The network maintains an up-to-date list of available course enrollments and professional development opportunities.

An Advisory Board of Partners shares in decisions such as future course purchases and the development of additional support and communication resources.



*Flexible Learning Options
for the
21st Century Student*

Wisconsin eSchool Network

For more information
please visit our website:
www.wisconsineschool.net

or contact:

Connie Radlike
(920) 832-1744

edlikeconstanc@aasd.k12.wi.us

*Flexible Learning Options
for the
21st Century Student*

Wisconsin eSchool Network



The Mission of the Wisconsin eSchool Network is to share high quality online learning resources and best practices while maintaining maximum autonomy for schools and programs to best meet the needs of their local community.



Today's students and their parents are looking for more options and more flexibility in their education choices. The Wisconsin eSchool Network provides a means of addressing the unique learning needs of individual students.

You can become a part of the Wisconsin eSchool Network as a Partner, a Member, or through Individual Student Enrollments.

Partners are committed to online learning options for their staff and students on an ongoing basis.

Members have the opportunity to offer high quality online resources with local staff involvement without developing a full local program.

Contracting for individual course enrollments is a good way for local districts to explore online learning opportunities for their students.

WISCONSIN eSCHOOL NETWORK PARTNERS

- Provide upfront investment funds for statewide course licensing and maintenance - ensuring long term sustainability
- Have nominal per student operating expenses
- Provide local teacher(s) to teach established online course(s)
- Maintain local control, autonomy and accountability
- Benefit from the best practices and experience of existing partners
- Have access to online teaching and learning professional development
- Are assigned a mentor from an existing partner district
- Have a vote in future course/resource selections

WISCONSIN eSCHOOL NETWORK MEMBERS

- Pay a set annual fee
- Provide local teacher(s) to teach established online course(s)
- Have access to 30 enrollments per semester for local students for each local teacher provided
- Share local course "seats" to provide access to "seats" in other Network provided courses
- Maintain local control, autonomy and accountability
- Benefit from the best practices and experience of existing partners
- Have access to online teaching and learning professional development
- Are assigned a mentor from an existing partner district
- Have input in future course/resource selections



INDIVIDUAL STUDENT ENROLLMENTS

- Contracts for individual semester course enrollments or blocks of 20 semester enrollments are available.
- Pre-approval is required from the local district.
- A local contact person must be identified to monitor the student progress, support the student and online teacher and to proctor the semester exam.



WISCONSIN CHARTER SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

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DAVID WARD
President, NorthStar Economics, Inc.
Sturgeon Bay

TO: Senator John Lehman
Representative Brett Davis

FROM: Holly Hart, President (715-834-2488)
Cindy Zautcke, Vice-President (414-288-1540)

DATE: January 16, 2008

RE: Legislative proposals regarding virtual charter schools

The Wisconsin Charter Schools Association supports legislative efforts to maintain the choice of families choosing virtual charter schools in Wisconsin.

Legislation recently introduced in the Assembly by Representative Brett Davis accomplishes this goal. Their bill clarifies state statutes to make certain that the parents' ability to choose the best public school option for their children is secure. Furthermore, the Assembly Bill 697 was designed in consultation with people trying to solve the issues created by recent court rulings: parents, teachers, and authorizers of virtual charter schools.

Legislation proposed in the Senate by Senator John Lehman, however, does not protect this option for families. It proposes cutting funding for virtual schools by 50 percent. It creates enrollment restrictions on students and sets arbitrary burdens on virtual school teachers.

We encourage legislators to work with grassroots efforts to protect the thousands of families that have selected this innovative option for their children.

CC: Assembly Education Committee
Assembly Education Reform Committee
Senate Education Committee

WCSA

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Madison, WI 53701-1704

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Chairman Davis, Vice-Chairman Newcomer, Representatives Nass, Townsend, Lukmir, Nygren, Pope-Roberts, Mason, Akkeren, and Hixson, fellow educators, and parents and children of Wisconsin:

My name is Oliver Burrows. While I am not here today to speak in an official capacity as a representative of Insight School of Wisconsin, I am pleased to have the opportunity to address the Assembly Education Committee as an educator and iMentor of students attending a virtual high school partnering with the Grantsburg School District. I also before you come as a parent of our daughter, who had the opportunity to take on-line high school courses while recovering from a serious illness that limited her ability to attend high school in 2006.

As an adjunct college professor for five colleges and universities the past 28 years and an on-line instructor the past seven years teaching subjects ranging from English, mathematics, and environmental science to the social sciences and business, I know the value of on-line educational opportunities to students who otherwise might not be able to finish their degrees and become successful professionals. As an advisor, social studies teacher, and department team leader for Insight School of Wisconsin the first half of the first semester this year, I know the challenges that many students face in completing high school and earning a degree that will prepare them for successful careers in business, serving our country in the armed forces, or pursuing a technical, two year, or four year college degree. As an iMentor who contacts students daily by telephone and e-mail or through my virtual office to encourage them and direct their educational efforts, I know the barriers that many of my students face in achieving that academic success which will be essential for them to become valuable contributors to the our state and nation. As a former business owner and vice-president in two small businesses with over 20 years of experience in the



information technology field, I know the need for trained workers to enhance the productivity and economic growth of our state.

Having recently read a summary of a study that found 30% of all students in the United States today do not complete high school, I am also aware that the traditional face-to-face classroom environment does not meet the educational needs of all Wisconsin students. For many, the opportunity for virtual education through on-line schools represents their last hope of earning their high school diploma and fulfilling their hopes and dreams. Please do not let those dreams become a distant memory.

Unlike many legislative acts that come before this committee, AB697 is not asking you, our representatives, to spend more money for education. It only asks that the monies now being spent on educating our children and future taxpayers be directed to an alternative means of meeting their educational needs. It only addresses through the legislative process issues that otherwise will be settled on a case-by-case basis through the judicial system. The result of these decisions could well be result in the closure of all virtual on-line schools in Wisconsin. This would have a devastating effect on the lives of a number of students, some of whom you see here today. It would also have an impact on the future of our state, as we could well lose future leaders in business, education, and perhaps even government. Please do not let that happen; please vote to pass AB697 and deliver a loud message to all of the people of Wisconsin that we will allow no child to be left behind educational now or in the future.

In conclusion, as a high school social studies teacher, I have taught the history of Wisconsin and noted that we have a history of being a progressive state. We have done much to guarantee access to post-secondary education in our state. While those on both sides of the Assembly and Senate may disagree on what it means to be progressive, I fervently hope that you, our representatives,



and your colleagues in the Senate will see the need to guarantee that same educational access to students needing and benefiting from virtual on-line education from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Other states are watching the state of Wisconsin and how we respond to the challenge of educating all our children. Please continue the progressive tradition for which our state is known. Your actions today and in the weeks to come will not only benefit our children now but also our state and nation in the future. They are depending on you; please do not let them down.

Thank you.

**Testimony by William Harbron, Superintendent of the Northern Ozaukee School
District before the Assembly Education Committee**

January 16, 2008

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is William Harbron and I am the Superintendent of the Northern Ozaukee School District. Our district operates the Wisconsin Virtual Academy and Honors High Online, two high-quality online public charter schools. I am pleased to be here today alongside my colleagues from other school districts and the hundreds of parents, students and teachers that came to the State Capitol to support their online schools.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the Northern Ozaukee School District, our Board of Education, and all of our administrators, teachers, students, and families, I want to thank you for your leadership and support for online charter schools and public school options for children. We want to thank you for introducing an excellent piece of legislation that will protect all Wisconsin's online schools, eliminate the future legal threats, and help us get back to what we are passionate about doing as educators – helping children learn and achieve.

Five years ago the Northern Ozaukee School District launched the Wisconsin Virtual Academy (WIVA). Our goal was to offer an innovative online public charter school using licensed and highly qualified teachers, established best practices of distance learning, and a rigorous curriculum to educate children. We have succeeded. We want to continue this success for years to come. The Northern Ozaukee School Board of Education, our teachers and administrators are committed to the students in our online schools.

Wisconsin Virtual Academy has been at the center of the discussion around online public charter schools. But we did not choose to be in this position. It was forced upon us in 2003 when the state's largest teachers union, the Wisconsin Education Association

Council, filed a lawsuit against our public school in an attempt to shut it down and eliminate our school as an option for students and a choice for families.

In the past, the union's legal challenges against online charter schools were unsuccessful. In 2002, a district court threw out a case against Appleton School District and their online charter school. In 2006, the Ozaukee county court also handed the union a defeat when the court ruled the Wisconsin Virtual Academy was *not* in violation of the open enrollment, charter school or teacher licensure statutes, as alleged by the union.

However, last December the state Appeals Court issued a ruling against WIVA that was so sweeping it threatened every online school in Wisconsin. It may have been a win for the union, but it was a loss for children.

We do not believe that our school violates these statutes and we are hopeful the Wisconsin Supreme Court will rule in favor of online charter schools, as two previous courts did.

Yet, the Appeals Court decision is extremely unsettling for the teachers, administrators and parents – and, of course, the more than 3,000 students enrolled in online charter schools. If nothing is done, three thousand children could see their public schools close. Licensed and highly qualified teachers could lose their jobs. These teachers are, ironically, all dues-paying members WEAC, the very union that has tried to shut these schools down.

But there is a solution. AB 697, the bipartisan bill sponsored by Reps Davis and LeMahieu, will protect and preserve our online schools. The bill clarifies the Wisconsin statutes and specifically addresses the issues in dispute in the courts. The bill protects access for students, supports the best practices of online learning used in Wisconsin across the United States, and preserves long standing tradition and policy of local control for school districts. Most importantly, it allows innovative online public schools, and our excellent teachers that work in these schools, to continue serving students.

Unfortunately, legislation proposed by Senator Lehman will do the opposite. It would force school districts to shut down their online charter schools.

Senator Lehman proposes a massive 50 percent cut in funding to online public charter schools. Such an enormous cut would make it impossible for districts to operate online schools. If enacted, thousands of children would lose their schools and many teachers would lose their jobs.

Wisconsin's online schools already only receive nearly half of the total funding provided to traditional public schools, and less funding than what many other states provide to full-time online schools.

Senator Lehman's bill also establishes arbitrary new mandates on teachers that are not based on any research or best practices used in online learning, and it creates new enrollment provisions that restricts access for children and stifles the ability for parents to choose an online school for their children.

Tomorrow, my colleagues and I will address the serious concerns we have with the Senator Lehman's proposal at another hearing. We hope significant changes will be made to his bill to ensure our schools are protected.

Meanwhile, the Wisconsin Virtual Academy continues to be a model of education success. Today, WIVA serves more than 800 students. Parent satisfaction is extremely high and students' test scores are very strong. Last year WIVA made Adequate Yearly Progress and exceeded the state's proficiency scores in nearly every grade and subject tested. Ninety-two percent of WIVA students were advanced or proficient in reading. Every year, we've demonstrated excellence and achievement. This record demonstrates our commitment to accountability and academic results. The Northern Ozaukee School Board holds our online schools accountable for its academic performance, because they too are committed to all of these students and their families.

WIVA is thriving. It is a highly accountable public school where students meet and exceed academic and attendance requirements, and our faculty is professionally trained in delivering online instruction. Our licensed teachers are committed educators who are passionate about delivering individualized, one-to-one instruction to their students. The school uses powerful technology including engaging web-based courses and electronic “virtual” classrooms. We also build a strong school community through numerous clubs, events, and face-to-face activities. (My colleagues Kurt Bergland and Mike Skurek will give a more detailed explanation of our instructional model during their testimony).

We are proud to serve children with learning challenges, medical conditions, and special needs; high performing students; students that need to move at their own pace; and students who require a more flexible schedule and personalized learning experience.

All of this and more is what has made our online schools an excellent public school option for many. It is what has made online charter schools – and their ability to deliver personalized learning – a popular choice for a growing number of families.

The Northern Ozaukee School Board of Education, our teachers and administrators are committed to our online schools. It is why we are here today asking every member of the Legislature to stand with us in support AB 697. This bill has the support of the districts that operate online charter schools, including their superintendents and members of their Boards of Education. This bill has the support of our online school teachers, administrators, parents and more than 3,000 students and their families. We hope that all members of the Legislature will join in support of AB 697 – a bill that will help us save our online public schools.

Thank you.



WISCONSIN
VIRTUAL ACADEMYSM

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OF **WISCONSIN**

Protecting Funding for Wisconsin's Online Public Schools

December 28, 2007

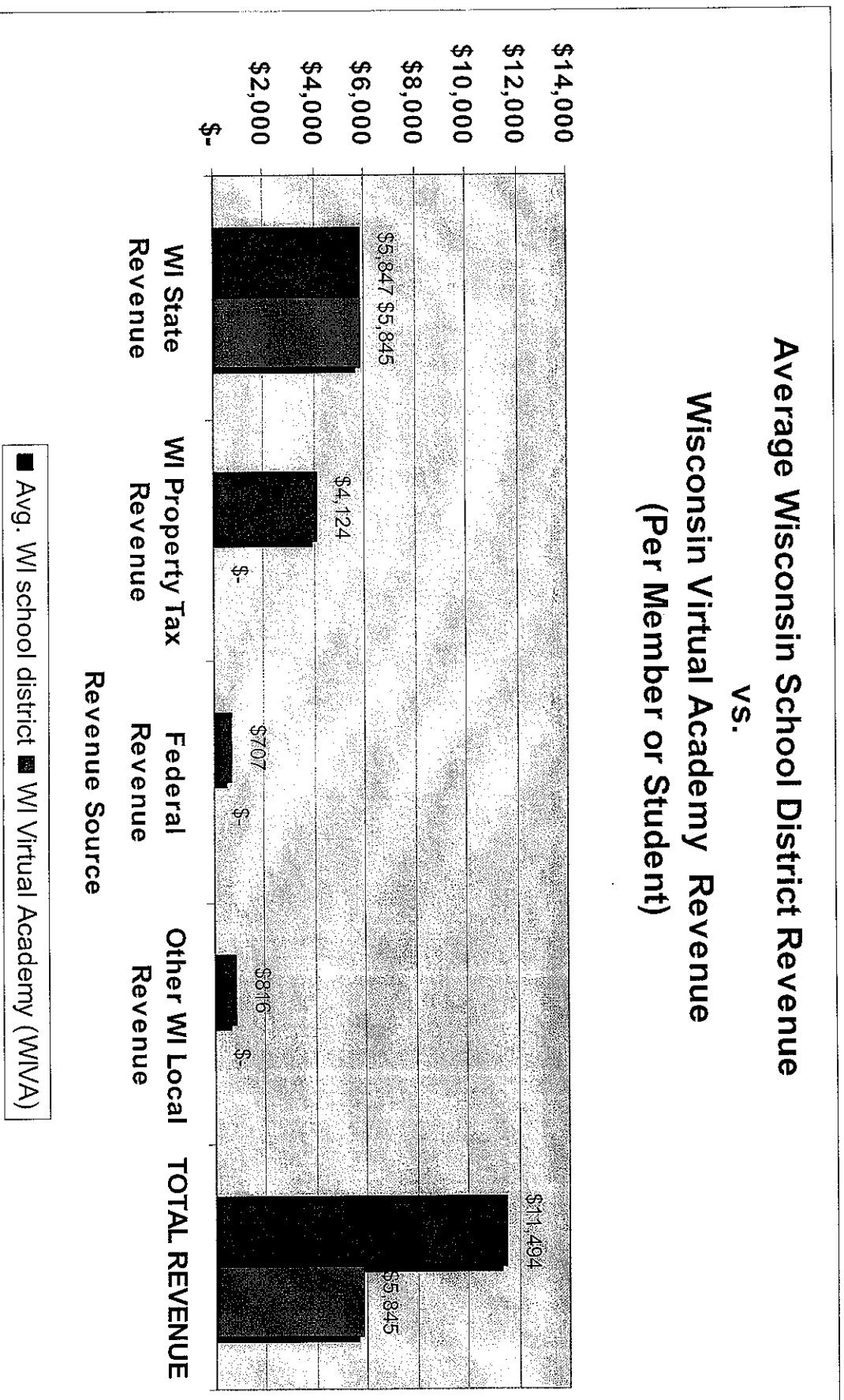
Current Facts

- 12 virtual schools operate in Wisconsin serving 3,000 students
- All will be impacted by the Court of Appeals decision.
- Absent a legislative fix by February 2, 2008 when open enrollment begins, school administrators will be forced to make the difficult decision to remain open or close for the '08-'09 school year
- The legislature must amend the Charter School, Open Enrollment statute and clarify the Teacher Certification statute in order to save these successful schools and continue to provide this important education choice for Wisconsin families.

Bellsouth Foundation 2006 National Report on Virtual Schooling

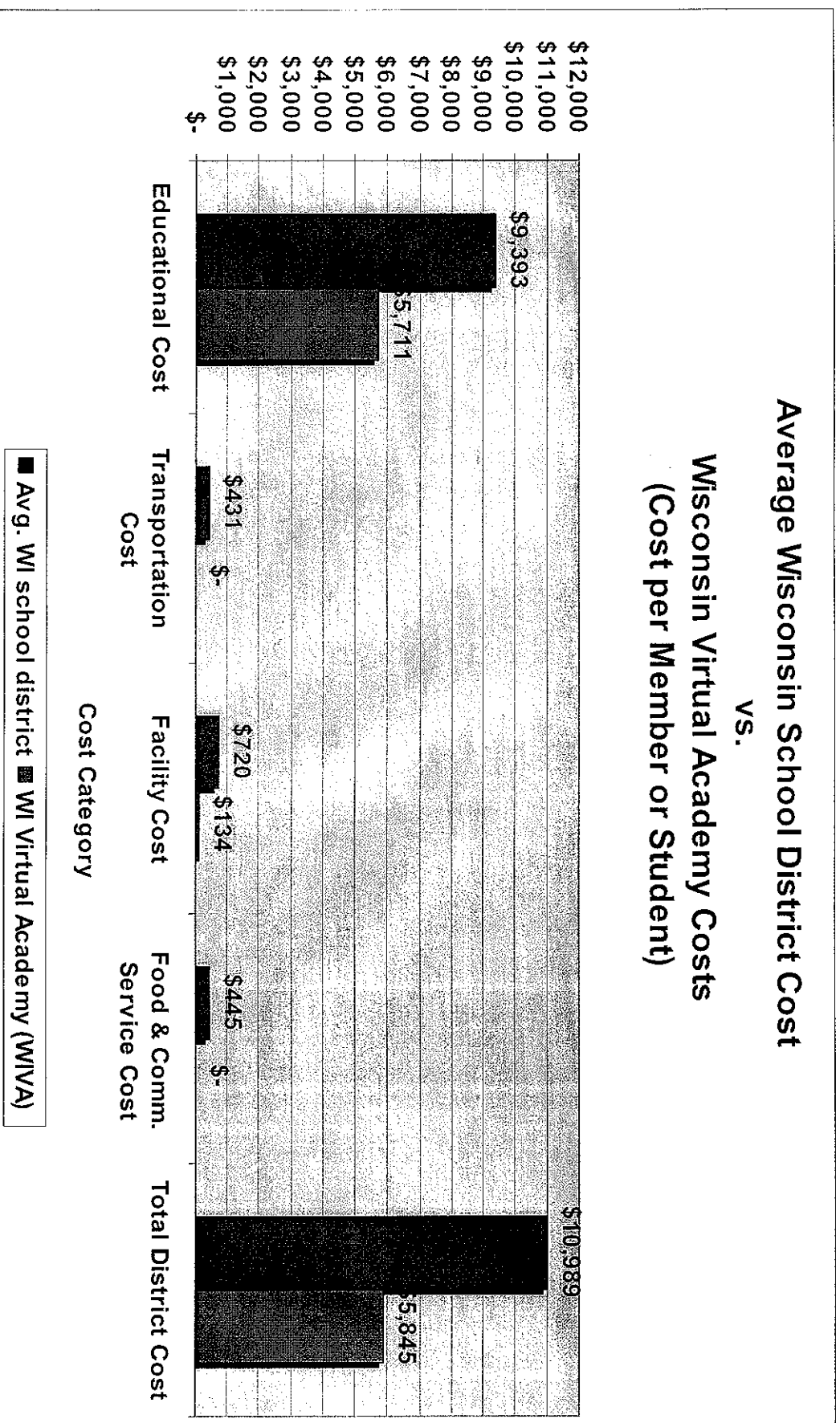
- Prepared by Augenblick, Palaich & Associates for the Bellsouth Foundation
(www.apaconsulting.net/Flash/papers/Costs&Funding.pdf)
- Conclusion: For a full time virtual program, costs range from \$7,200 to about \$8,300 per member
- Wisconsin's Online Public Charter Schools only receive \$5,478 revenue per student.

Wisconsin Virtual Academy receives only 51% of total funding to educate a student as compared to the average WI public school district



Source: WI Department of Public Instruction Website for state data & WIVA FY07 finance documents

Wisconsin Virtual Academy's total expenditures represents 53% of the average Wisconsin school districts' total expenditures

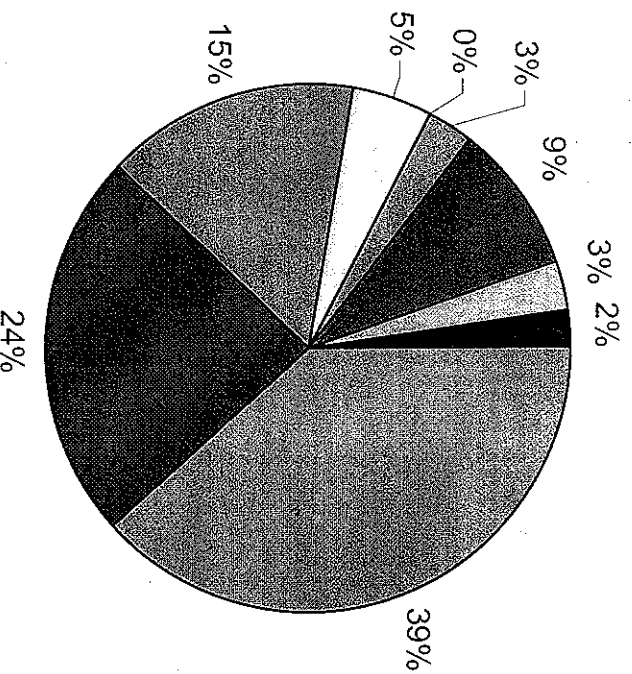


Source: WI Department of Public Instruction Website for state data & WIVA FY07 finance documents

Teachers are the most important and largest cost

- The Bellsouth study concluded that “teacher salaries make up a large percentage of overall program costs.”
- This is also true for Wisconsin Virtual Academy as its teacher compensation represents 38% of its costs with 85.6% of its cost going to direct student instruction.

Wisconsin Virtual Academy Expenditures- '06/'07



- | | |
|---|------------------------------|
| ■ Teacher Costs | ■ Student On-Line curriculum |
| ■ Student instructional materials | □ Student computers |
| ■ School technology and data services | ■ Student Internet |
| ■ District Administration | ■ Sponsor oversight |
| ■ Facilities, utilities & office expenses | |

Conclusion

- Online public charter schools already receive nearly 50 percent less than the total funding provided for traditional schools, and less funding than many other states provide online schools.
- Reducing funding will force school districts that operate online schools to cut academic programs, layoff teachers, or even close the online schools.
- Full-time online public charter schools are highly accountable, successful public school options with proven results. Wisconsin Virtual Academy met AYP, and WIVA students' test scores exceeded the state average in nearly every grade and subject.



The Costs of Running a High Quality, Full-Time Public Virtual School

(Based on FY07 financial information)

Revenue Category	Revenue/Member	%
State Revenue	\$ 5,845	100.0%
Property Tax Revenue	\$ 0	0%
Federal Revenue	\$ 0	0%
Other Local Revenue	\$ 0	0%
Total	\$ 5,845	100.0%
Expenditures Related to Direct Instruction:	Expense/Member	% of Total Expense
Teacher compensation, benefits & education-related expenses	\$ 2,240	38.3%
Student On-Line curriculum	\$ 1,396	23.9%
Student instructional materials	\$ 903	15.5%
Student computers	\$ 305	5.2%
School technology and data services	\$ 2	0.0%
Student Internet reimbursement	\$ 159	2.7%
Sub-Total Expenditures Related to Direct Instruction	\$ 5,005	85.6%
Other Expenditures:		
District Administration	\$ 538	9.2%
Sponsor oversight	\$ 168	2.9%
Other - facilities/utilities/office expenses, etc	\$ 134	2.3%
Other Expenditures Total	\$ 840	14.4%
Total Expenditures	\$ 5,845	100.0%

Analysis and Observation:

- 85.6% of spending goes to direct instruction costs with the biggest cost being certified teachers.
- Quality full-time virtual public schools don't have the high facility costs like traditional public schools. However, the technology costs in virtual schools are much higher than a traditional public school.
- Virtual school curriculum costs can vary significantly depending on the quality, depth, rigor and technological sophistication of the curriculum. The overwhelming majority of parents, teachers, and administrators who have used the K12 Inc. curriculum agree that it is the best virtual school curriculum available and it is a key factor in the school's success.



What is included in the biggest cost categories?

- 1. Teacher compensation, benefits & education-related expenses-** WIVA's largest single expense in the FY07 fiscal year was teacher salaries, benefits, and education-related expenses. Other education-related expenses included teacher computers, printer/fax machine, software, On-Line curriculum, materials, travel expenses and office supplies. In FY07, WIVA employed 19 teachers. All WIVA teachers are licensed and certified to teach in the grades they serve. All WIVA teachers are considered Highly Qualified Teachers per the No Child Left Behind standards.
- 2. Student On-Line Curriculum-** WIVA and H2O use the K12 Inc. curriculum which includes the On-Line school and traditional instructional materials.

The K12 On-Line School is the robust, powerful technological instrument that is the foundation of the K12 learning program. The K12 Online School hosts over 6,000 interactive, engaging and comprehensive lessons presented in a mix of printed and multimedia forms in all the traditional subjects: Language Arts/English, Math, History, Science, Art, and Music. Every student with access to the K12 Online School receives an individualized learning program, set at their academic level that allows them to progress at their own pace and in their own learning style.

The K12 Online School also includes all the scheduling and assessment tools:

- Initial placement tests to examine and determine a student's competency level in each subject, which ensures the correct starting point for each student in the K12 learning program.
- Assessments at the end of lessons, units and semesters to measure the student's progress and knowledge of each subject.
- Planning tools that allow the teacher and parent to set up a schedule and lesson plan and view lesson lists.
- Attendance tracking system to determine each student's number of instructional hours for each lesson in each subject.
- Progress tools to determine the pace and level of the student in every subject to ensure every student is making quality progress. The progress tool provides information on what assessments have been taken, what needs to be accomplished and what percentage of the course has been completed.
- Step-by-step hands-on activities.
- Creative ideas for alternative learning approaches.



- Information on additional material to prepare and gather for lessons.
- Teaching tips, keyword definitions, and audio pronunciation guides.
- Optional education activities; and supplemental lessons and exercises.

Unlike traditional textbooks and workbooks, the K12 Online School is continuously monitored, updated and improved to ensure students are learning.

3. Student Instructional Materials- Upon enrollment in the Wisconsin Virtual Academy, students are sent 6-9 boxes of instructional materials to compliment the K12 On-Line School. This mix of online, interactive learning complimented with traditional textbooks and materials is what students and parents love most about the WIVA program. Some examples of what students received include:

- books, workbooks, and classical novels;
- math manipulatives and science experiment supplies;
- K12 proprietary phonics tile kits;
- U.S. and global maps;
- art books, musical instruments and music instruction CDs;

Many more materials and supplies are included in a student materials kit that cannot all be listed here. Together with the On-Line School, they comprise a thorough, complete and high quality educational program.

4. Student Computers and Internet- WIVA provided students with a desktop computer, monitor, speakers, and a color printer. Software is delivered pre-loaded on all student computers and included: MS Windows XP operating system, MS Office suite of desktop productivity software, virus protection software, and Internet filtering software. Additionally, WIVA families are reimbursed for their Internet access, which serves as a key tool for instruction.

5. School technology and data services- This category covers a wide range of turnkey technology services for WIVA. Below are the largest tasks provided:

- Student Account Management System- creation, storage, and maintenance of a student account management system that tracks all student demographic and contact information, student course placement, computer information, and miscellaneous other information pertinent to school operations.
- Administrator and teacher training on the use of the student account management system.
- School public Website- Develop, design, publish, and maintain the WIVA interactive public web site, www.wivcs.org . Provide security and webmaster support.



- Dedicated teacher intranet website- design, develop, and maintain a private website to allow teachers to interact within the national network of teachers at K12 Inc. curriculum schools. WIVA teachers use this private website to share best teaching practices specific for a virtual environment.
- Administrative office computer and telephone network design and supervision.
- Parent and student technology support through a "1-800" tech support phone line available 24/7. Online and printed tech support manuals are available to all parents including a self-paced interactive online training program.
- Dedicated teacher technology support and training.
- New software research and selection services. Example: Web filtering software per ORC.
- Customized data reports to support state reporting requirements.
- Provide centralized email services for all school communications.
- Specialized data analysis and project management services as needed to support special projects toward higher student performance or increased parent satisfaction.
- Unlimited use of Internet technology that allows teachers to directly instruct to students over the Web.

6. Administrative services- This category of costs captures a broad range of operational and administrative services. They are listed below:

- Work with the Academy to address the continuing professional development needs of the administration and staff
- Collect, analyze, and disseminate research on teacher quality in a virtual environment
- Financial services
- Work with WIVA counsel on legal matters affecting or of the Academy;
- Propose written policies and procedures for the Academy;
- Creation, security, and maintenance of a secure student filing system;
- Data entry services and administrative reporting for student account information system;
- Plan and arrange school orientation sessions
- Prepare WIVA for the accreditation process
- Represent WIVA at conferences and Open Houses
- Participate in the charter renewal process with the Governing Authority, as needed
- Arrange for the negotiation, selection, contracting, distribution, and re-shipment or return (as necessary) of instructional materials for students, administrators, and teachers on the Academy's behalf
- Create, design, and deliver virtual school training binders to Academy teachers and administrators
- Set up and disseminate K12 login and password accounts to students,



- teachers, and administrators and manage changes to those accounts
- Design the look and feel of the WIVA web site including content management.
 - Design administrator recruiting ads
 - Design school information printed materials
 - Design school letterhead, cards, and logos
 - Design school student application and enrollment forms
 - Design and code school calendars, threaded discussion groups, message boards, and other community-building aspects of the Academy-specific web site
 - Identify and source all curriculum and assessment materials necessary for the Educational Program
 - Negotiate a distribution agreement with the Academy's school supply vendors on the Academy's behalf
 - Negotiate agreements with the Academy's professional service providers and testing centers for proctored examinations on the Academy's behalf
 - Answer enrollment questions from potential families (phone, mail, and e-mail) and assist the Academy in managing the enrollment process, including the processing of paperwork and data entry
 - Apprise families of their status in the Academy's enrollment process
 - Assist with public relations and demand creation for the Academy and its Open Houses and other events via mail, e-mail, newspapers, magazines, journals, radio, television, community forums, town hall meetings, and other forms of communication and outreach on the Academy's behalf
 - Assist with the drafting and distribution of Academy press releases
 - Field and respond to incoming calls, letters, faxes, and e-mails about the Academy, its curriculum, the application/enrollment process, instructional materials, etc.
 - Conduct focus groups, surveys, interviews, observation sessions, and/or user testing on the online school program to obtain feedback on how to improve the program
 - Create "feedback buttons" on lessons so that students, parents, and teachers may send in lesson comments and suggestions; respond to suggestions and implement improvements
 - Assist with setting up and implementing special education policies, procedures, and services for children with special needs
 - Conduct exit interviews for those who withdraw in order to learn more about how to improve the program for families
 - Advise and assist with the creation of teacher training materials for new and returning teachers
 - Create and mail new student packages, including the "Start-Up Guide" and "Welcome Packet" to newly enrolled families



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

DON PRIDEMORE

TO: Assembly Committee on Education

FROM: State Representative Don Pridemore

RE: Assembly Bill 697, relating to Virtual Charter Schools

DATE: Wednesday, January 16, 2008

Thank you Chair Davis and the members of the Assembly Committee on Education for hearing Assembly Bill 697 today.

One of the many issues and challenges that the Wisconsin State Legislature faces in today's complex and changing world is that of educating our children. At no time in our history have we ever seen the changes even one or two short years will bring. Technology and innovation is speeding forward at a pace never before known to man. One of the basic foundations of this phenomenon is the advent of the personal computer. We have an entire universe of knowledge and information at our fingertips and we have just begun to utilize and harness its power.

Computers have without question increased productivity at every imaginable place in our lives. One of the most significant areas of increased productivity is in the realm of communication. The worldwide web and e-mail have revolutionized almost every aspect of how we communicate thoughts, ideas and information. Everywhere in our lives the power of this technology is being harnessed to improve quality as well as quantity through an increase in productivity.

We must also allow these same increases in productivity to education our children. With the budget restraints our state faces and the absolute need to compete in a world in a market, we simply cannot afford to allow education to languish in the past. We must look through the window of the future and take full advantage of the powerful opportunity that virtual schools present to us.

Virtual schools **MUST** be allowed to reach their potential. School districts, teachers and administrators **MUST** understand the power this technology can provide to the future of education.

This is about our freedoms, our choices, this is about parents, this is about students and this is about the future opportunities for our children. AB 697 is the bill that will allow technology and education to continue to come together. I ask each of you put our future ahead of old traditions and special interests and support AB 697.

January 16, 2007

Sen. John Lehman
Rep. Brett Davis

RE: LRB 3684/5 and LRB-3144/6 - Virtual Schools

Dear Sen. Lehman and Rep. Davis:

As a researcher in the area of virtual education policy and author of the comprehensive annual national report *Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning*, I feel compelled to comment on the legislation proposed to address the virtual learning issues raised by the recent court decision in Wisconsin. In particular, I am deeply concerned about the issue of funding for quality online learning.

One of the misconceptions that many policymakers and the public have about online learning is that it costs significantly less than brick-and-mortar education. The assumption among those who have not carefully studied online learning is that virtual programs must be relatively inexpensive to operate due to a lack of physical classrooms and similar facilities, and because the online technology may allow great efficiencies in teaching many students with online content and very few teachers.

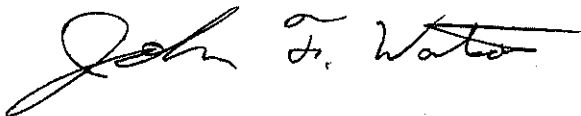
Despite these misconceptions, several studies have found that the cost of online learning is quite similar to the cost of traditional schools teaching similar student populations. For example, no less an authority on school financing than Augenblick, Palaich and Associates concluded in its 2006 report, *Costs and Funding of Virtual Schools*, that the operating costs of a quality full-time virtual public school and a traditional school serving essentially the same student population are substantially similar.

The cost of online learning is similar to the cost of traditional schools for two reasons. First, teachers are a central part of the online classroom, just as they are in physical classrooms, and the single largest cost of online learning is the cost of teaching. Second, online schools have technology infrastructure costs—course development and licensing, networking technology, and software, for instance—that approach the infrastructure operating costs of traditional schools.

It has been my experience in monitoring the evolution of online learning in the United States over the past eight years that the consequence of under-funding is the inability of programs to operate and to innovate to provide the highest quality education to students. They may be replaced by substandard providers, or not replaced at all, and the downward spiral in quality can have a chilling effect on the state's overall K-12 virtual learning effort.

Wisconsin very seriously risks this unwelcome outcome if the General Assembly approves the language in Senator Lehman's bill that would cut funding for virtual charter schools by 50%. It is hard to imagine how the state's existing virtual charters would be able to continue serving students, and the impact on Wisconsin's leadership position as a progressive online learning state would be severely damaged. I urge the Wisconsin General Assembly not to allow this to happen.

Sincerely,



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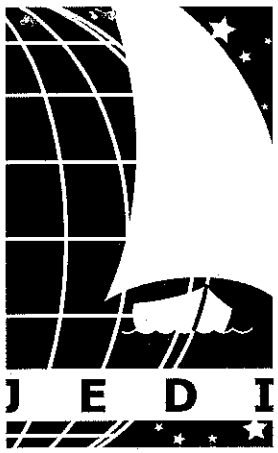
Monroe Virtual School
Discussion Points
Assembly Hearing
January 16, 2008

- Department of Public Instruction advised Wisconsin school districts that the charter school statute and open enrollment statute allowed for the registration of virtual school students. See DPI presentation from spring of 2007.
<http://dpi.wi.gov/sms/ppt/07chartconf.ppt>
- **Why do we have a virtual school?**
 - Vision of former Monroe Virtual School Principal Dan Bauer.
 - Serving those students who the education system was failing (at either end of the spectrum)
 - Helping to ensure that those students who are at-risk of not graduating could earn a high school degree and have the opportunity for success in their life.
- **Who do we serve?**
 - Students who the regular education system was not working for in one way or the other
 - Accelerated Students—We've had a national scholar
 - Students with Discipline Issues—Truancies or Expulsions
 - Medical Conditions—Photophobia, Stomach Migraines, ADHD, Simple Biorhythm Issues
 - Teenage Mother/Fathers or other Heads of Households
 - Previously Home-Schooled Students
 - Students who felt threatened, bullied or picked on in their schools
 - Parent/Student Schedules: Olympic-Training, etc..
 - Adult learners who have returned to get their high school diploma
 - This model does not work for all. It will never replace brick and mortar schools. The students must have some self discipline and want to learn to be successful.
 - Students from Monroe, from throughout the state and in some cases students from other states.
- **How do we educate?**
 - Licensed teachers make home visits, provide student support and guidance, administer testing and issue grades for students
 - Curriculum and Coursework Lessons provided primarily by universities along with some supplementary sources
 - University of Nebraska
 - University of Missouri
 - Brigham Young University
 - Stetson University

- School District of Monroe Developed Coursework
 - School District of Monroe Independent Study Programs
 - CESA 2, Aventa Learning and others for additional subjects such as Drivers Education, Music Lessons, Additional Middle School Offerings
- **Are we making money?**
 - Yes
 - We took a great risk in starting the school
 - We have taken on the responsibility of educating nearly 400 students
 - Many have said they want schools to “run it like a business”
- **What do we stand to lose?**
 - The educational opportunity for our students
 - The hope and purpose that this educational opportunity instilled in those students
 - A number of families who were beginning to view public schools in a more positive light (Our parents are questioning why their student and their school is being threatened in a manner which would never occur with a “typical school”?)
 - 15 or more staff members in the Monroe School District (7 certified staff and 2 support staff in the virtual school plus potential additional District layoffs/reductions due to loss of revenue)
 - The quality of our “regular” schools will be impacted
 - Fewer opportunities for Monroe Students
 - Community Support—This will impact our financial situation and the District vision laid out in our last referendum
 - Community Trust at both State and Local level—If we would lose 07-08 funding, no one will understand how we could operate the school and incur a years worth of expenditures and then not have funding available which would cost the district approximately a \$1.3M loss

Three Points on Lehmans Bill:

- Required Contact Hours – not realistic – not what virtual education is all about
- 85 – 15 enrollment requirement – arbitrary – this should be a parent choice
- Open enrollment funding – cutting funding by 50% will most likely close our doors – the logic behind reducing funding from the district that is educating the student and returning it to the district that is doing absolutely nothing for the student is absurd



Jefferson Eastern Dane Interactive Network

448 E. High Street ★ Milton, WI 53563
608-758-6232 PH ★ 608.868.4864 FAX
www.jedi.k12.wi.us ★ www.jedivirtual.com

January 16, 2008

To: Members of the Assembly Education Committee
Fr: JEDI Virtual School Executive Committee
Re: Rep. Brett Davis' Bill on virtual schools

To summarize our comments,

- We ask you to please allow us do our job in providing alternative ways to educate our young people.
- JEDI Virtual core courses are designed to meet Wisconsin standards and are developed and taught by Wisconsin-certified teachers.
- We support the definition of virtual charter schools as stated in Rep. Davis' bill.
- We support exempting virtual schools from the requirement of current law that only pupils who reside in the school district in which an independent charter school is located may attend the charter school.
- We support the clarification the bill makes that a pupil may attend a charter school in a nonresident school district through the Open Enrollment Program.
- We support the continuation of state aid funding at the same level as students in a traditional program.
- We thank you for your efforts to clarify the role of virtual schools and offer our assistance in any way that may be helpful as you study this issue.

Mike Swartz
Chairman
JEDI Network Executive Committee
Superintendent of Jefferson School District
Phone: 920-675-1010

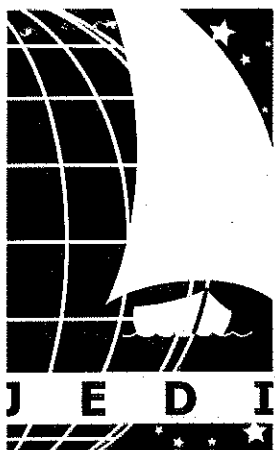
Other Executive Committee Members

Dr. Leslie Steinhaus
Superintendent, Whitewater School District
Phone: 262-472-8708

Dean Sanders
Superintendent, Lake Mills School District
Phone: 920-648-2215

Ron Dayton
Superintendent, Cambridge School District
Phone: 608-423-4345

Attachment: Critical Attributes



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Critical Attributes of the JEDI Network and JEDI Virtual School

- JEDI Virtual School is a Wisconsin charter school and meets the requirements of the law in accordance with state statute. It was chartered by the Cambridge School District and was licensed/authorized by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). It is one of the services that the JEDI Network consortium offers its members.
- JEDI Virtual School is UNIQUE because JEDI-developed courses are taught by Wisconsin-certified teachers. And, JEDI Virtual School core curriculum courses are developed by Wisconsin-certified teachers to meet Wisconsin-state standards.
- **JEDI Network's primary goal is to help member districts offer alternative methods of study customized for each student's needs. JEDI Virtual School courses are offered in a cost-effective online learning environment that meets Wisconsin-state standards.**
- Member districts can expand their traditional course offerings beyond their current capacities by using JEDI Virtual School services.
- JEDI Virtual keeps students enrolled in their own districts and reduces the number of students seeking services from other educational institutions or dropping out of school, and also retains state funding for the member districts.
- The JEDI Virtual School is a service provided by the Jefferson Eastern Dane Interactive Network (JEDI Network) -- a consortium of nine public school districts, one university and one technical college in southern Wisconsin. The consortium, originally established in 1995, was one of the original distance education learning networks formed in the state of Wisconsin to offer consortium members diverse course offerings.
- The current JEDI Network consortium of public school districts and university members includes: Cambridge, Deerfield, Fort Atkinson, Jefferson, Lake Mills, Marshall, Palmyra and Whitewater, Johnson Creek, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and Madison Area Technical College.

(over)

Testimony before Assembly Education Committee
January 16, 2008

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to testify at this hearing today. My name is Kurt Bergland, and I am the Wisconsin Virtual Academy Principal.

As principal of the school, I understand all too well that the threat to our existence in the courts also has come to mean that the existence of all virtual schools in the state is threatened. This is a fundamental problem because for too long the education profession, of which I am a member, has been unable to effectively meet the needs of a large percentage of its student population. It could be said that our profession has been excellent at schooling in this, but not very good at helping real learning take place.

At this point in history, we stand on the brink of being able to provide real alternatives for students who, for many different reasons, have not been fortunate enough to have their educational needs met by traditional schooling. It is an exciting time, because we are just beginning to see the potential of what could be for thousands of students in our state. Sometimes we make missteps, sometimes we make false starts, but often we find exactly what an important segment of students need, and provide it very, very well.

I just drew a distinction between schooling and learning. That kind of difference is more than a rhetorical point—it shows something that we have learned to be the case about virtual schools in general, and that I have learned about virtual school leadership in particular. For, just as schooling is something that does not fit the virtual school model, what I do on a daily basis is not really being a “principal.” This is because I do not do many of the things that principals in traditional schools do—I do not worry about the boiler breaking down, or leaks in the roof, or approving another fundraiser for a school group.

One of my concerns that is different from a brick and mortar school budget is about a major part of our budget—the services offered by our curriculum provider. The reason for this is that my budget is not the “schooling” budget of a brick and mortar principal,

but a budget that supports real education. It pays for educational materials—books, math manipulatives, science experiments, and lots of consumable materials—things that get used up, like papers that students write on. It pays for the loaning of a computer and printer to families for their educational use. It pays for a technology network comprised of software, and equipped with the services of tech support people that my teachers and our students can access. And, it pays for the postage to move these materials through the mails.

The computer network that we use is different, and more costly, than the network used by many brick and mortar districts because it performs many more functions for us. The materials that our students use, because they most often work in their homes, does not allow us to enjoy the economies of scale that schools often enjoy by having students share materials in their classrooms. Our curricular program is self-paced, meaning that students can progress through two or even three grade levels in a particular subject in a particular school year means that sometimes more materials are needed for one student in one year than would be used by her counterpart in a brick and mortar school in two or three.

The accusation that somehow WIVA is wasteful of resources is offensive to me, because it shows an ignorance of how our students work and a basic disregard for the work that our teachers do to support student learning. Indeed, we do more with fewer resources than our counterparts in brick and mortar schools. And, we do so at a rate of achievement that is the envy of the vast majority of schools in our state.

So, even though my title is “principal,” the work that I do sometimes means that I am a principal, sometimes means that I am a curriculum director, sometimes a director of technology, sometimes an educational leader—and sometimes I am something that has not even been given a title yet. And as principal, my budget represents learning and those things that truly support learning, at a fraction of the cost of traditional schooling.

Mr. Chairman, my point is that as you consider legislation regarding virtual schools, I urge you to remember two things. First, please do not think of us as you might think of a school in a district. In a way, because of our students' needs, and because of the many things that we are involved in, we are much more like a small school district unto ourselves than we are like a traditional brick and mortar school. This is important because, as you consider our budgets, you will observe that they are far more like a school *district* budget than they are like an individual school budget.

Second, please remember the students who we work with on a daily basis. I said before that, for too long, our profession has been unable to meet the needs of too large a percentage of students. We are the pioneers on the frontier of what education can become for tens of thousands of students in the 21st century. Our school's focus on the core curriculum for students who have not prospered in the schooling of traditional schools provides exactly the kind of education that tomorrow's workers will need. To eliminate that kind of opportunity is not only a bad decision for the economic health of the state, it is a decision that is immoral because it deliberately excludes students from real learning, and sends them back to the schooling environment that was not successful for them in the first place.

Thank you.

**WISCONSIN VIRTUAL ACADEMY (WIVA)
WHITE PAPER – INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL**

**By Michael B. Skurek
Wisconsin Virtual Academy – Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
January 9, 2008**

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Purpose

The Wisconsin Virtual Academy (WIVA) is a K-8 public, virtual charter school operated by the Northern Ozaukee School District. Contrary to the many mistruths perpetuated by the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) in the courts and media since the onset of litigation against WIVA, this paper will demonstrate the high level of student learning that occurs on a daily basis in the school and dispel several important myths related to virtual education. In fact, in many respects, WIVA's innovative learning program is not only *just as good* as the learning programs found in many traditional public schools across the State of Wisconsin, it is even better.

School Operation – How it Works for Students and Families

To begin with, WIVA students in grades K-8 use a very demanding standards-based hybrid curriculum, delivered to their homes by the school's curriculum provider: K12 (www.k12.com). A hybrid curriculum includes books, workbooks, novels, a variety of hands-on learning tools, microscopes, etc. These learning tools are delivered by UPS directly to students' homes. Students and parents are given logins to access a school website known as the Online School, which serves as a curriculum organizer for families. This site is the means through which learning activities are assigned, mastery learning can be assessed, and student records are maintained for teachers.

WIVA teachers communicate with students and parents in a variety of ways. Students attend online: classes, office hours, tutoring sessions, workshops, and teacher-student one on one conferences. To facilitate electronic interactions between students and teachers, the Wisconsin Virtual Academy uses a web-conferencing Internet site known as **Elluminate**. Using this site, students can talk, raise their hands, write on a whiteboard, use a web-cam, work cooperatively with other students, and basically interact in many ways similar to a traditional classroom environment. In addition, teachers schedule face-to-face skills workshops, classes, and small group tutoring sessions. WIVA teachers also make home visits to work directly with students. Not unlike other public schools, WIVA teachers require the completion of assignments to demonstrate learning and mastery of important course content.

Mastery-Based Learning

New students in the Wisconsin Virtual Academy take placement tests which are used to determine the appropriate skill and knowledge level for each of the four core courses offered at each level: History, Science, Math, and Language Arts. Most often, students are not placed at grade-level for all of their courses. For example, a typical 4th grader may be placed in 3rd grade Language Arts, 5th grade Science, 4th grade Mathematics, and 3rd grade History. Contrary to what we have traditionally seen in our public schools, because all people have areas of strength and areas that require a little more effort, it is uncommon for students to be placed in courses completely at grade level.

Commensurate with the best known educational practices, for each course, WIVA teachers have developed a list of Essential Understandings (EUs). The EUs are the most important big ideas that every student is responsible for any particular course. WIVA teachers evaluate their students based on these Essential Understandings and assign trimester grades of NA (not assessed), D (developing), and M (Mastery) for each one of the EUs. As a result of this highly acclaimed standards-based approach, students who complete all of the required curriculum and assignments for any particular course, and demonstrate mastery of the Essential Understandings, will move on to the next course in a course sequence, even if the completion date is prior to the end of the school-year. During each of the past two years, over 500 WIVA students benefited from this mastery-based approach to learning.

Thus, high ability and gifted students are able to work at their own very rapid pace, traversing a variety of courses during the course of one school-year. Likewise,

students who are challenged in certain content areas are given the latitude to progress at a slower than usual pace, taking the time necessary to demonstrate mastery of the important course concepts, prior to advancing to the next course in the content area sequence.

Last but not least, the most important aspect of mastery-based learning is related to student motivation. WIVA students from grade K-8 understand that partial understanding of course content and skills will not suffice. Students do not have the option of “not getting it” and moving on to the next lesson, unit, and/or course. As a result, WIVA students excel.

Myth Number 1: Instructional Time, Comparing Apples and Oranges

The amount of instructional time that occurs between WIVA teachers and students is said to be too small when compared to the instructional time that occurs in traditional schools. Furthermore, it is assumed that if a student spends 7 hours of his/her day in a Wisconsin public school, it follows that there are 7 hours of instruction that occur. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

In an often cited study on the reality of instructional time in schools, it was found that the actual amount of instructional time that occurs in schools is in the range of 30% of the school day (Gilman & Knoll, 1984). Between recess, waiting in lines, study hall, announcements, special assemblies, etc., the instructional time in traditional schools is dramatically lower than expected. 30% leaves the 7-hour instructional time at 2 hours and 6 minutes.

Another study included in its findings delineations between the actual allotted time in schools, the “student learning time” designated by state statute, and the “actual learning time” (Suarez & Others, 1991). Even with only a cursory analysis of the time spent instructing students in classrooms, it often includes social greetings, time for explanation, correcting/checking homework, passing out papers/materials, assigning new assignments, etc. As a result, the time spent on “teaching,” those precious moments when teachers become the magical purveyors of knowledge, are fewer and farther between than we would expect. The 2 hours and 6 minutes becomes considerably less.

WIVA teachers instruct students in a variety of ways: classes, one on one conferences, face to face meetings, tutoring sessions, etc. In addition, WIVA teachers are responsible for assessing and evaluating student mastery of important learning goals: in classes, one on one conferences, face to face meetings, tutoring sessions, and by providing feedback on assignments. When all of these interactions are seen together, the student instructional time for a virtual teacher in the Wisconsin Virtual Academy is in fact very similar the instructional time in traditional schools.

Important footnote: current educational research recognizes that lecture as the means to student learning is—for the majority of our students—not an effective practice. As a new teacher, my mentors suggested that I not lecture for more than 1 minute per year of age of the student. In fact, younger students can simply not attend for an entire class period. The romantic image of the teacher in the media, as the purveyor of knowledge, with students attending to and forever remembering every word and concept that rolls off his/her tongue is simply not reality. The fact that students need to be actively

involved in their learning is further evidence that the WIVA educational model is not only viable, but an improvement—for many students—over the traditional classroom.

Myth Number 2: The Parents are the Teacher

Student learning is at its best when students are responsible for creating meaning out of life's challenging problems. A teacher who focuses on lecture merely shares his understanding, and does not allow students to truly learn for themselves. WIVA students are in an ideal situation because they are instructed, formatively assessed, guided, evaluated, and given the opportunity to make sense out of our complex world, through their challenging curriculum. It only makes sense that parents are available to move the process along.

While most schools struggle to involve parents in the educational process, WIVA parents are closely involved in the education of their children. One WIVA parent likens the experience to “being there to see your child’s first steps.” To paraphrase, instead of sending a child “down the street” to the local public school, parents get to be there when the first words are read, and for all the other educational milestones. As a result, for the vast majority of WIVA families, the relationship between parent and child grows stronger.

WIVA delivers the curriculum to students’ homes. This includes all of the books and other materials that are essential to the learning process. Parents are neither expected nor required to evaluate student learning. This is exclusively the job of the WIVA Teacher. Similar to what occurs in many Wisconsin homes, parents attempt to help

students with organization, goal-setting, and also by providing tips on how to be successful on lessons; and similar to the thousands of aides who work closely with teachers in schools throughout Wisconsin, WIVA parents are given specific directions and guidelines from teachers regarding how to best assist their children.

Conclusion

Because of the forward thinking educational model established at the Wisconsin Virtual Academy, students love to learn and excel as a result. While many studies have emphasized the importance of spending more time in school (Prisoners of Time, 1994; Nation at Risk, 1983), the amount of time that WIVA students spend actively involved in learning is a testament to the validity of the model. As of Monday, January 7, 2008, **36% of WIVA students have spent more than the number of attendance days required by Wisconsin State Statutes.** How many schools in Wisconsin have this high a percentage of students going beyond the mandated attendance requirement?

As WEAC continues its efforts to forever end this type of virtual education in Wisconsin, it is incumbent upon us to remember that there is not one school that works for all students; and our primary focus must be on providing the best possible educational experience for all public school children in our state. Let us not deprive our children and future generations of the opportunity to learn in a valid, new, and different way, simply because of WEAC's fear of larger class sizes (larger classes=less teachers=less dues paid=less political power). Let us think first about the interests of our children—our future—and not about promulgating the interests of a temporarily misguided union.

References

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Suarez, T.M., and Others (1991). Enhancing Effective Instructional Time: A Review of
Research. North Carolina Educational Research Center, Chapel Hill. Sept 25, 1991.

Dear Lawmakers,

I am a single mother in a low income situation & my teenage daughter & I live in a rough neighborhood in Green Bay, Wi. I am very glad to have the opportunity to enroll my daughter in Wis. Connections Academy as it provides a safe environment for her to learn in a situation that is safe & free of the type of stress that prevents many of our inner city Wisconsin students from learning. I hope you will be progressive enough to see this is the education of the future.

Please support it. (Mr. Davis' bill)

Thank you,

Jan M. Austin

1449 Morrow St.

Green Bay, Wi. 54302

my daughter Muriel is 13 years old & in 7th grade. She is an serious student, & an avid reader.

Hello! My name is Wendy Krump from Ettrick (Trempealeau County) and I am a mother of eight children, I have some experience in educating children, but more importantly I have Success! My oldest son, Nathan, is a decorated Army Major war hero (Bronze star and Air Medal with Valor for having rescued the first two MIAs in the Iraq war). Another, my son, David, is currently a professor of English at Viterbo University in LaCrosse. After receiving his Masters in Creative Writing (the very top of his class) from Oxford University, England, he brought honor to the English Department by winning the prestigious Ruth Lily Poetry Fellowship Award.

My husband and I value an inquisitive mind and good education very highly. Depending on where we were living, our journey educating our children has led us to home school, or have them attend private, parochial, or public schools. In short, we are open to new concepts in education.

We currently are educating our two youngest daughters (10 & 14 years old) a fifth grader in WIVA and a 10th grader at iQ Academics. Both are excellent examples of Wisconsin online public schools. This is the best venue we have found yet for opening minds, inspiring creativity, learning a real lesson in global community. The main thing that sold me on online educating was the opportunities for Advanced Placement courses. My local school district offers only one AP course, and will not run it if the enrollment isn't sufficient, but my daughter, Jubilee, may choose from 16 different AP courses with confidence because her public online school will run any course she chooses even if she is the only student enrolled! Everyone who has ever sent a son or daughter to college knows what that can mean...a measureable savings in dollars! I haven't found another school district near me that offers even half as many opportunities for AP classes, and I spent quite a bit of time on the phone! I challenge you to do the same.

Wisconsin is poised on the cutting edge of public school education, please watch over our tax dollars, and let them continue to provide our children with the best education I have found yet, and I have talked with people today who would be willing to move out of state in order to continue to give their children the best education at an affordable price. Oh, I forgot to tell you what I do..I'm the Food Production Manager at Franciscan Skemp Hospital and Nursing Home in Arcadia. And I'm enrolled in online classes from the University of North Dakota to complete my own education.

Sorry, my bus is
going to leave
soon

Please
Goggle my two oldest
Nathan
David Krump &
Remember Krump

ONE SIZE
DOES NOT FIT ALL
IN EDUCATION!

Wendy Krump
krump.wendy@mayo.edu



Reasons to consider eSchool online course options

New Student

- Student transfers in from a school on a block schedule or trimesters
- Student transfers with course for which there is no district classroom equivalent
- Student enrolls mid-term who had not been attending school
- Transfer student having a difficult time filling their schedule due to closed classes

Enrichment

- Student would like the experience of taking an online course
- Student wishes to enhance their independent learning skills
- Student wishes to utilize accelerated programming opportunities such as completing a full credit course in one semester or over the summer
- Student would like to take an AP course that is not available at their site
- Student who wishes to explore a particular area of interest not otherwise available
- Student wants a higher level of control over their learning pace

Scheduling Difficulties

- Low enrollment eliminates course option desired by student
- Student has a schedule conflict that can be resolved with an online course
- Student needs a semester of a course to move to the next level
- Student drops a course and is seeking to add a different course during the "drop window"
- Student with schedule challenges as a result of participating in a Coop, Tesla, Renaissance, Valley New School, Music etc

Unique Circumstances

- Student is on homebound and would like to add a course in addition to traditional homebound instruction
- Student with extended absences for health reasons
- Student needs a course beyond their schedule in order to graduate
- Self-supporting student is working and needs greater flexibility in his/her daily schedule
- Teen parent needs a short day schedule to handle his/her responsibilities
- Student is on a voluntary withdrawal with approval by the administration
- At Risk or EEN student might benefit from an online course taken primarily in a resource room or the ILS Lab with the program specialist as their mentor/coach
- Student participating in a foreign exchange program could assure earning the credits required for his/her diploma
- Family circumstances include short-term relocations during the school year
- Student is unable to participate in full day schedule successfully due to health/behavior problems

WISCONSIN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION COUNCIL

Affiliated with the National Education Association

*Every kid
deserves a
Great School!*

Testimony before the Assembly Education Committee
Concerning AB 697, Relating to Virtual Schools
January 16, 2008

I come before this committee to express my significant concerns and opposition to Assembly Bill 697. My name is Lucy Brown. I am not an educator; I am legal counsel for the Wisconsin Education Association Council and have been involved in the lawsuit that WEAC and others brought against the Northern Ozaukee School District in regard to its operation of the Wisconsin Virtual Academy (WIVA). My comments to you today are not about the quality or lack thereof in virtual education. My comments deal with my concerns about the loss of accountability for educational quality and funding fairness that come with the provisions of Assembly Bill 697.

First, my concerns are grounded in my knowledge of the operation of WIVA. This school is primarily home schooling of elementary age pupils by the parents with public dollars being paid to support the home schooling and to pad the budget of the local school district. K12 Inc., the for-profit company behind WIVA, sends educational materials to the students and their parents. These materials include guides to assist the parents with their presentation of the lessons and their evaluation of the student's work. The required contact that WIVA students have with a certified teacher consists of one or two twenty-to thirty-minute phone calls per month; and at most four approximately half hour classes over the computer per month. In addition, each student is required to send several work samples to their certified teacher each month. No additional contact is required. The assistant principal of WIVA reassured parents in a newsletter that only 2% of the student's school time would be taken up by these required contacts with the certified teachers.

It is accurate that WIVA students and parents can, and I am sure some do, have additional contact with their teachers through computer contact, telephone contact, and in-person contact at optional field trips and gatherings organized by WIVA. It is also accurate that WIVA teachers, who carry a full-time load of approximately 60 students, reported numerous problems with parents and students who failed to follow the curriculum, with parents and students who avoided even the few required contacts with the teacher, and with parents who were incapable for a variety of reasons to teach their child. But there was no way for these teachers to step in and take over the instruction when such failures or problems occurred.

The other fact about WIVA that I believe is important to understand is the funding structure. Less than 1% of the students in WIVA live in the Northern Ozaukee School District. Not one cent of local tax dollars supports WIVA's operation, all the funds come from open enrollment moneys deducted from state school aids earmarked for WIVA students' home districts. The Northern Ozaukee School District, however, benefits

Mary Bell, President
Dan Burkhalter, Executive Director

financially from the other school district's losses. In the present school year, the Northern Ozaukee School District will receive from the open enrollment payments, approximately \$162,000 above the amount it incurred for all of WIVA's expenses. This is money Northern Ozaukee uses to support its local, brick-and-mortar schools. Furthermore, large amounts of the money are spent on advertising for WIVA; more money from other districts that is not spent on the education of the students.

Assembly Bill 697 will permit schools like WIVA to continue operating as they presently operate. Such operation lacks the two primary safeguards that have in the past provided the citizens and taxpayers in Wisconsin with assurances of quality public education.

The first safeguard is the presence of highly qualified teachers in the classroom with the public school student. A certified teacher is trained to evaluate learning, to diagnose and address appropriately any learning issues. To fully perform these functions, especially when young children are being educated, the teacher must be able to observe and interact directly with the student. If Assembly Bill 697 is enacted as written, this assurance of quality is lost. There is no requirement for any student contact with a certified teacher.

The second safeguard that has always been part of the Wisconsin public education system is local control of the schools. There is no local control of these schools as set up by Assembly Bill 697. A local chartering community will not care about the quality of the school as their tax dollars will not support the school and their students will not go to the school; the community does not even see the school in the community. What the school board and the community care about is that the school brings in revenue for the real community schools. Seeking to maximize profits is rarely the way to produce the best product.

Finally, Assembly Bill 697 continues the use of full open enrollment payments to fund virtual charter schools. This is of significant concern. First, the open enrollment formula has no relationship to the actual costs of educating a student in a virtual charter school like WIVA. And I urge the legislature to ask itself if it is good for public education generally to pay the full open enrollment amount for virtual schooling when virtual charter school students receive so much less in services. Second, because these schools are established to make a profit for the home district, there is likely to be a race to the bottom in terms of quality. The providers know that they will get the \$6,000 plus open enrollment amount whether they provide a quality product or a stripped down model. And for some, if not many of the parents who enroll their young children in these schools, the stripped down model with little interference from the administration and teachers is just what they want after they receive a curriculum, educational materials and computer.

In regard to funding, another particularly troubling part of Assembly Bill 697 is that of the "2r" independent charter schools. Under the bill the City of Milwaukee, the UW-Milwaukee, and UW-Parkside will be permitted to charter virtual schools that can accept students from anywhere in Wisconsin. This is a significant departure from the original

intent to provide choices for pupils residing in Milwaukee and Racine. As you may know, the Milwaukee Racine Charter Program is a sum-sufficient first draw on general school aids. In this school year local districts lost nearly \$45 million dollars in charter reductions, for which they can raise local property taxes to make up for the loss. The seventeen 2r independent charter schools receive \$7,699 per student, significantly more than the open enrollment amount of \$6,043. Under AB 697 charter reductions to local school districts in the state would increase, resulting in local property tax increases.

In conclusion, WEAC does not oppose the use of virtual education in Wisconsin's public schools. But it does oppose virtual education paid for with public dollars when all the safeguards that the legislature has always insisted upon to ensure quality in public schools are discarded. The mantra of parental choice cannot overcome the quality assurances that come with real local control, a qualified teacher instructing the student, and funding fairness. I urge this committee to insert provisions that provide such assurances of quality public education to Assembly Bill 697 or oppose it.

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**Hearing on AB 697
Assembly Education Committee
Open Enrollment Program and Virtual School Financing
Testimony by Richard G. Chandler**

January 16, 2008

Good afternoon. My name is Rick Chandler. I'm the President of Chandler Consulting, LLC, and I'm providing consulting services to the Wisconsin Coalition of Virtual School Families on state school finance issues related to the operation of virtual schools. I'm familiar with school finance issues based on 14 years of experience as the Director of the State Budget Office from 1987 to 2001.

I'm testifying today to provide background information related to the virtual school bills under consideration by the Legislature. The central points of my testimony will be:

- The open enrollment program under which virtual schools operate is revenue neutral for the state and for property tax payers in individual school districts.
- The per pupil transfer aid amount under the open enrollment program is set based on a logical approach recommended by a Legislative Council study committee.
- Setting a different transfer aid figure for virtual school open enrollment pupils would be arbitrary and would create a windfall for sending districts.
- The open enrollment finance system is currently working well and changing it would cause virtual schools to close, to the detriment of pupils and teachers.

Here are some basic background facts about school finance in Wisconsin:

- In the 2006-07 school year, average per pupil spending in Wisconsin schools was budgeted at \$11,085 per pupil, according to the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance.
- The amount of this spending that was subject to the state revenue limits was \$9,149 per pupil on average. This was the average amount that districts were allowed to spend for each pupil from the combination of the property tax levy, general school aids and computer aid. (This figure varies from district to district, and the proportion of this figure that comes from state aids varies from district to district.)

Here's some background information about how the state's open enrollment program works. In 2006-07, when a student moved from one district to another under the open enrollment program, the following happened:

- The receiving district had its state equalized aids increased by \$5,845, and the sending district had its state aids reduced by \$5,845.
- The receiving district did not count that student for revenue limit purposes. The receiving district got \$5,845 in open enrollment transfer aid but did not levy any additional school property taxes.
- The sending district was still able to count that student for revenue limit purposes. The average sending district was able to spend \$3,304 related to that pupil from a combination of state aids and the property tax levy (the difference between the average revenue limit figure of \$9,149 and the transfer aid amount of \$5,845). The sending district did not levy any additional property taxes related to that pupil.

The \$5,845 per pupil transfer aid figure was based on a calculation that DPI makes each year. That amount is intended to reimburse receiving districts under the open enrollment program for the variable costs which accompany students they receive, while still allowing sending districts to recoup the fixed costs associated with pupils they send.

- Each year, DPI is required to determine an open enrollment transfer aid figure based on statewide average per pupil costs for regular instruction, co-curricular activities, instructional support services and pupil support services.
- These are regarded as the variable costs that are incurred by the receiving school districts when students transfer.
- The sending districts still have fixed costs that they have to pay when students transfer (e.g., costs incurred for administrative overhead), so they retain some revenue to pay those costs.
- This methodology for calculating open enrollment transfer aids was recommended by a 1996 Legislative Council study committee which helped develop Wisconsin's open enrollment program.

The current approach under the open enrollment program has several desirable features. It strikes a balance that reimburses receiving districts and sending districts for costs they incur.

In addition, the current open enrollment transfer aid formula is revenue neutral for the state, for receiving districts, and for sending districts.

- The state pays the same amount of equalization aid when a student transfers.
- The receiving district does not collect any additional property taxes when a student transfers.
- The sending district collects the same amount of property taxes when a student transfers.

The \$5,845 transfer aid figure is a reasonable figure for virtual schools, and cutting it in half as has been proposed is not reasonable.

- Virtual schools are already educating students for close to half the average cost for bricks and mortar schools.
 - Last year, virtual schools spent about \$5,845 per pupil, and bricks and mortar schools spent about \$11,085 per pupil.
- Setting the transfer aid figure at half of the figure that was set under existing law last year (which would have set it at \$2,922) would be problematic for several reasons:
 - The 50% figure is an arbitrary figure which has not been justified by any studies comparable to the Legislative Council study at the inception of the open enrollment program.
 - The 50% figure would create a windfall for sending districts, which would retain \$6,227, much more money than they need to cover their fixed costs.
- For virtual schools, the \$5,845 figure results in their breaking even in some cases, losing money in some cases, and making a modest profit in some cases.
 - Setting the transfer aid figure at a significantly lower level for virtual schools would result in large operating losses for the schools and a shutdown of their operations.
- Arguing that the \$5,845 figure overcompensates virtual schools overlooks the difference between "course costs" and "school costs." While virtual schools have costs that are related to course materials they offer, they also have other costs related to teaching, supervision and administration that need to be covered.

I would argue that the open enrollment program has worked well for students, for bricks and mortar schools, and for virtual schools. It has provided a viable and beneficial educational option for many students. It strikes a balance that provides a reasonable transfer aid funding level that reimburses receiving districts for their additional costs and doesn't penalize sending districts. It was structured in a way that gives students the opportunity to enroll in the educational program that best meets their needs, without creating financial incentives for transfers or setting up financial roadblocks to transfers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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